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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the nature of transfer student expectations of the college environment and how these expectations affect academic performance and satisfaction with the college experience. The sample consisted of 100 entering freshmen, 100 upperclassmen, 228 transfer students at a Collefe of the State University of New York. The students responded to Stern's College Characteristics Index which measured what they thought was generally true of college life. At the conclusion of the first semester the grade point average and satisfaction score, determined by the Student Satisfaction Questionnaire, were ascertained for each student. It was found that both freshmen and transfer students had unrealistic expectations of the college environment and anticipated a high intellectual or non-intellectual climate. The effect of the unrealistic expectations of transfer students on academic performance and satisfaction was somewhat unexpected and not altogether clear. Positive correlations were shown between grade point average and total disparity score for part of the sample, and small negative correlations were discovered between satisfaction and grade point average. Assimilation of the new students was accomplished early in the first semester and their perceptions became more realistic after approximately three months of classes. (Author/RSM)

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Transfer Expectations*

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Capsule Statement - "Transfer Expectations"

Harold Donald Buckley

This study was an effort to evaluate the effect of new student expectations of the college environment. Freshman and transfer students were compared to upperclass students' perception of the effective environment. The "transfer myth" was isolated and its effect noted.

Transfer Expectations

H. Donald Buckley

With the emergence of the "feeder college" and the increase in student mobility the transfer student has become a significant part of higher education. He is not a new phenomenon; what is significant today is his sudden and rapid increase.

Historically, the transfer function was the first recognized purpose of the junior college and was the function supported by such early promoters as Tappan and Folwell, Harper, Lange, and Jordan. They advocated a "bifurcated university" in which the work of freshmen and sophomore years would be turned over to secondary schools, and the university would begin its work with the junior year (Medsker, 1960). Thus the primary function of the junior college early in its development was that of providing students opportunity to begin the curriculum which they would later pursue in a senior college or university.

Today the junior college has grown into a comprehensive institution. It has established its own identity separate from both the secondary school and the university. During this development the transfer student has remained a significant concern of the junior colleges in the United States. Recent survey findings reveal that most of the junior colleges are dedicated to, or at least preoccupied with, "preparatory programs designed for college transfer." Of the 243 institutions which Medsker (1960) surveyed, almost 91 percent offered a transfer program. Today such programs attract the largest proportion of junior college students (Knoell and Medsker, 1965).

In almost every state surveyed by Bird (1956), the percentage of graduates transferring to senior institutions exceeded 50. In some states it constituted nearly four-fifths of the total number.

The Success of the Transfer Student

The academic success achieved by junior college students after transfer has been a primary concern of researchers. Throughout the years, scores of studies have been made of the performance of junior college transfers.

A recent national study of transfer students completed by Knoell and Medsker (1965) reported that grades of most transfer students improved over the period of two years which they spent in junior college, declined in the first year after transfer, and then improved in successive terms. They estimated that at least 75 percent and probably as high as 80 percent of junior college transfer students achieved their degree objectives.

It is the conclusion of many that when students are considered in groups, there is no significant difference between the academic success of the students who begin as freshmen in the institution and that achieved by students who come from junior colleges. Bird (1956), in her review of several of studies reported that

> Junior-college transfers make records approximately the same as those made by transfers from four-year colleges and by native students, sometimes excelling slightly and sometimes being slightly excelled by the other groups. They usually show a drop in their grade average in the first term after transfer but then recover that loss.

Hills (1965) refers to this drop in grade average in the first term after transferring as "transfer shock."

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to investigate the nature and effect of transfer student expectations of the college environment. It was concerned with the relation these expectations had to the perceived or effective environment of the college, and how this affected academic performance and satisfaction with the college experience.

It was hypothesized that statistically significant differences (α = .01) would be found between transfer students' expectations, freshmen expectations and upperclass students' perceptions of the press of the college. The congruence or dissonance of transfer expectations compared to upperclass perceptions was investigated as to its affect upon academic success and student satisfaction. It was also hypothesized that transfer students would modify their expectations to resemble the perceived environment of upperclass students within three months after transfer.

The samples for this study were drawn from a State University College of the State University of New York which provided a random sample of 100 entering freshmen, a random sample of 100 upperclass students, and the entire population of 228 transfer students for fall 1967.

Students comprising the samples were asked to respond to Stern's College Characteristics Index (CCI) (Stern, 1958, 1963) according to what they anticipated (transfers) or thought was generally true (upperclass students) of college life. This multivariate self-report questionnaire is designed to reflect student perception of

the environmental press of a college. The instrument yields scores for 11 first-order factors and 3 second-order areas.

First-Order College Environment Factors

1. Aspiration Level
2. Intellectual Climate
3. Student Dignity
4. Academic Climate
5. Academic Achievement
6. Self-Expression
7. Group Life
8. Academic Organization
9. Social Form
10. Play
11. Vocational Climate

Second-Order College Environment Areas

I. Intellectual Climate
II. Non-Intellectual Climate
III. Impulse Control

The transfer sample was later divided randomly into four sections and retested after one, two, three and four months of classes.

Statistical tests for differences in CCI scores between all samples were made by means of an analysis of variance and Scheffe test ($\alpha = .01$).

At the conclusion of the first semester the grade point average and satisfaction score (via the Student Satisfaction Questionnaire) of each transfer student was determined. The relationships between individual transfer student CCI scores, their grade point averages and their satisfaction scores were investigated by correlation coefficients (Pearson's r). These were tested for statistical significance at the .10 level using values of the correlation coefficients for different levels of significance developed by Fisher and Yates (1963).

Transfer Myth

New student expectations of the college environment and how they compared with upperclass student perceptions was the first question to be investigated (Figure 1).

CCI results indicated that transfer students entering the State University College expect a college environment with relatively high intellectual and non-intellectual press. Eight out of 11 first-order environmental factors of the CCI reflect a difference that is greater than +.5 standard deviation from the mean of the norm sample for the test. When compared with upperclass students transfer expectations were reflected in higher scores that were statistically significant on the Aspiration Level, Intellectual Climate, Academic Climate, Academic Achievement, Self-Expression, Group Life and Social Form factors (Table 1). Both the Intellectual Climate (Area I) and Non-Intellectual Climate (Area II) were also statistically significant in their differences (Table 2). Transfer students do anticipate an environment different from that perceived by upperclass students.

In an examination of transfer and freshmen CCI scores no statistically significant difference was discovered. A rank-correlation coefficient yielded a r' of .89 (statistically significant at the .001 level). All new students tended to have similar expectations of college.

FIGURE 1. Freshman, transfer and upperclass students' group factor score profile--CCI.

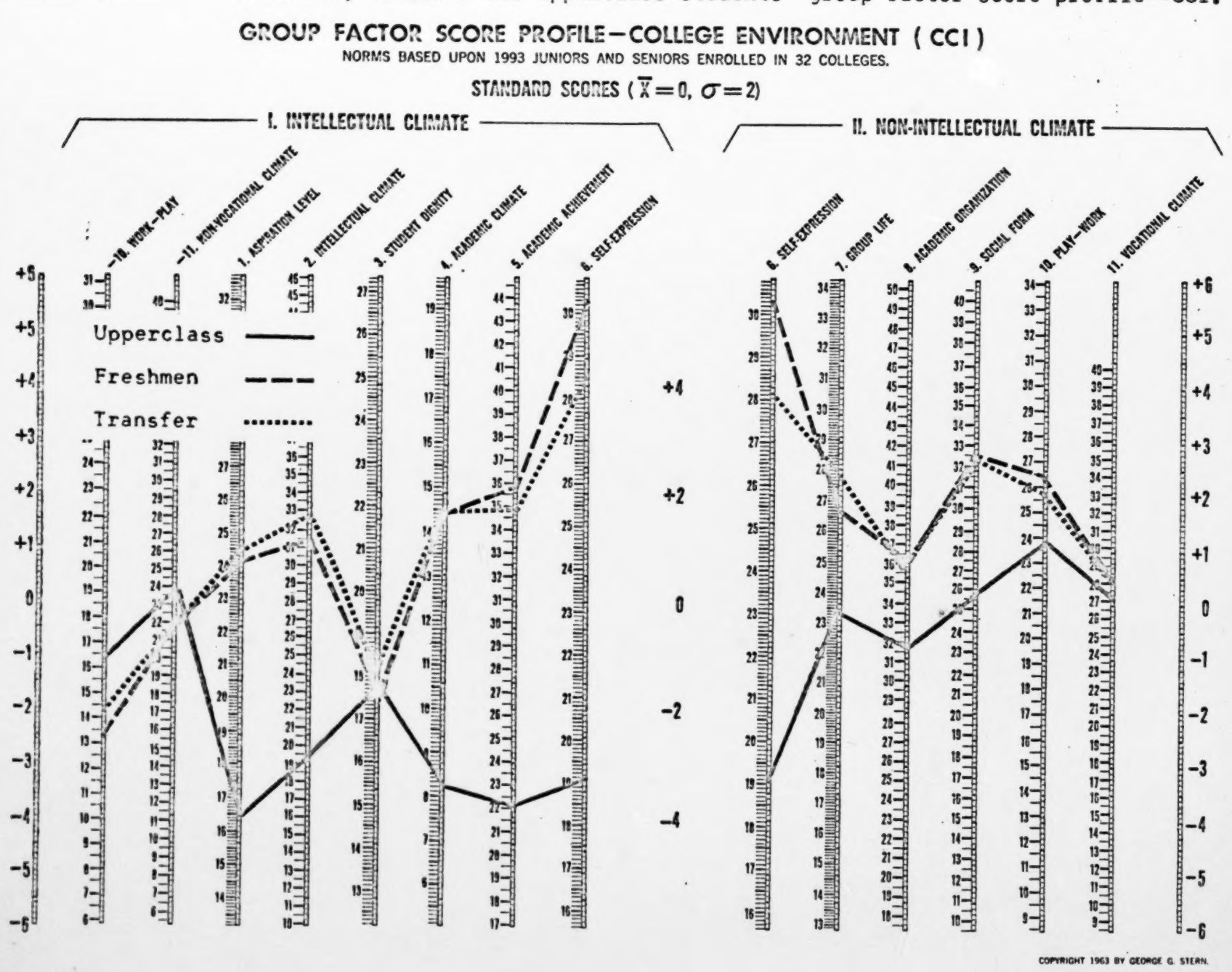

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TABLE 1. — Comparison between CCI first-order factor means of upperclass students with freshmen and with transfer students

Factors	Freshmen		Transfer	
	F'	p	F'	p
1. Aspiration Level	7.84*	.001	11.58*	.001
2. Intellectual Climate	8.07*	.001	12.36*	.001
3. Student Dignity	0.18	n.s.	0.70	n.s.
4. Academic Climate	8.10*	.001	11.31*	.001
5. Academic Achievement	9.94*	.001	12.81*	.001
6. Self-Expression	9.25*	.001	10.99*	.001
7. Group Life	3.39	.10	6.51*	.001
8. Academic Organization	3.42	.10	6.12	.10
9. Social Form	6.24*	.001	8.32*	.001
10. Play	3.19	n.s.	3.20	n.s.
11. Vocational Climate	1.33	n.s.	1.67	n.s.

(*α = .01)

TABLE 2. — Comparison between CCI second-order areas means of upperclass students with freshmen and with transfer students

Areas	Freshmen		Transfer	
	F'	p	F'	p
I. Intellectual Climate	8.42*	.001	11.84*	.001
II. Non-Intellectual Climate	7.13*	.001	9.19*	.001
III. Impulse Control	0.85	n.s.	1.36	n.s.

(*α= .01)

Previous research, especially Stern (1966, 1967, 1969), has established the characteristics of freshmen expectations. They arrive at college with extraordinarily high levels of expectations for almost all kinds of activities, both academic and nonacademic. Entering freshmen evidently share a highly idealized image of college life representative of no actual institution at all. These unlimited expectations have been designated as the "freshmen myth."

Both transfer and freshmen students seem to participate in a collective belief built up in response to the wishes of the group and held uncritically. This leads to an imaginary or fictitious anticipation of the college experience. It may be concluded that transfer students' expectations have the same mythological character as freshmen expectations. Therefore we may designate their unrealistic expectations as the "transfer myth."

These results indicate that we cannot assume that transfer students, even with previous college experience, begin with different expectations than freshmen. Both tend to exaggerate their expectations of the environment and anticipate a high intellectual and non-intellectual climate.

This lack of sophistication and idealization of college life has implications for our orientation programs. The necessity of freshmen enculturation has been recognized for some time. New students, other than freshmen, have been neglected or at best superficially considered. This study points out the need to expand our process of orientation and assimilation to include transfer students.

Effect of Transfer Myth

Consequences of the dissonance created by the disparity of transfer expectations and upperclass student perceptions of the college environment was our next concern. A total disparity score was computed for each transfer student. This was the sum of the real scale differences between their anticipated environment and the perceived environment of upperclass students. Our specific interest was directed to its effect on the satisfaction and academic success of transfer students.

At the end of the first semester a Student Satisfaction Questionnaire was administered and grade point average of transfer students determined. Results indicated that they tended to be satisfied with their college experience (median satisfaction score of 15 out of a possible 21) and were generally performing adequately (mean grade point average of 2.39).

It has been previously noted that transfer students usually show a drop in the first term after transferring but then recover that loss in grade point average in later semesters. One of the purposes of this study was to evaluate this "transfer shock" and the effect that expectations might have on academic performance and satisfaction with the college experience. It was hypothesized that the dissonance of student expectations would be related to grade point average and satisfaction scores. Though it was not stated beforehand a negative relationship was thought to exist between disparity scores and academic success. Negative relationships were

also projected for disparity and satisfaction. The relationship between academic success and satisfaction was expected to be positive.

Results indicated that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between grade point average and total disparity score for part of the transfer sample (those registered in liberal arts and from the professional-managerial socioeconomic class). A small but statistically significant negative correlation was discovered between satisfaction scores and grade point averages for the total sample. No relation was revealed between disparity and satisfaction (Table 3).

It may be that the positive correlation between disparity and grade point average for part of our transfer sample is a reflection of class values. Students from professional-managerial families tend to value education highly, as do those registered in liberal arts. Though their high expectations are not met they perform adequately and achieve "in spite" of their disparity.

The negative relationship between grade point average and satisfaction may indicate that academically prepared students who perform adequately may be less satisfied with their college experience. They expect, but do not find, challenge and fulfillment in the intellectual climate of the college. This could lead to frustrations and disappointments at times sufficient to result in students "dropping out" or becoming activists in forcing change.

TABLE 3. -- Significance of relationships between total disparity scores, grade point averages and satisfaction scores

Sample (Number)	Correlation Total Disparity/ Grade Point Ave.	Correlation Total Disparity/ Satisfaction	Correlation Grade Point Ave./ Satisfaction
Sex:			
Male (55)	.09	.15	-.03
Female (53)	.14	-.01	-.27*
Socioeconomic Class:			
Professional-Managerial (20)	.50*	.18	-.12
Clerical-Sales (10)	.27	-.09	-.03
Service (10)	-.16	.52	-.50
Agriculture-Fishing-Forestry and kindred occupations (8)	.61	-.01	-.73*
Skilled (34)	-.18	.11	-.31*
Semiskilled (15)	-.09	.18	.37
Unskilled (11)	.30	-.03	.23
Curriculum:			
Liberal Arts (40)	.28*	.15	-.03
Non-Liberal Arts (68)	-.01	.01	-.25*
Residence:			
College Resident (91)	.13	.01	-.20*
Commuter (17)	.01	.24	.10
TOTAL (108)	.11	.05	-.17*

(* α = .10)

Demythologizing the Transfer Student

Wallace (1966) has shown that freshmen are assimilated into the local campus culture early in the first semester. One purpose of this study was to investigate the assimilation of transfer students into the college environment.

Transfer students were divided into four groups for retesting. The CCI was administered to them after one, two, three and four months of classes. Results indicate that transfer students do modify their expectations of the college environment and approach the perceptions of upperclass students. Whereas before attending classes transfer students were statistically different from upperclass students on 7 factors and 2 areas, after three months of classes there were no statistically significant differences (Figure 2). They rapidly grasped the local perceptions and altered their responses, soon becoming undistinguishable from upperclass students.

It may be interesting to observe that at the beginning of the second semester, after four months of classes, the transfer student tended again to differ from upperclass perceptions of the college environment. This was revealed by a Scheffe test and is seen in 4 factors (Aspiration Level, Intellectual Climate, Academic Climate and Academic Achievement) and 1 area (Intellectual Climate).*

The rise in intellectual perception coming at the beginning of a new semester may be an indication of hopeful expectations

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*Note: An analysis of variance revealed no statistically significant difference among the four groups of transfer students who were retested. Therefore results may be nothing more than sampling error.

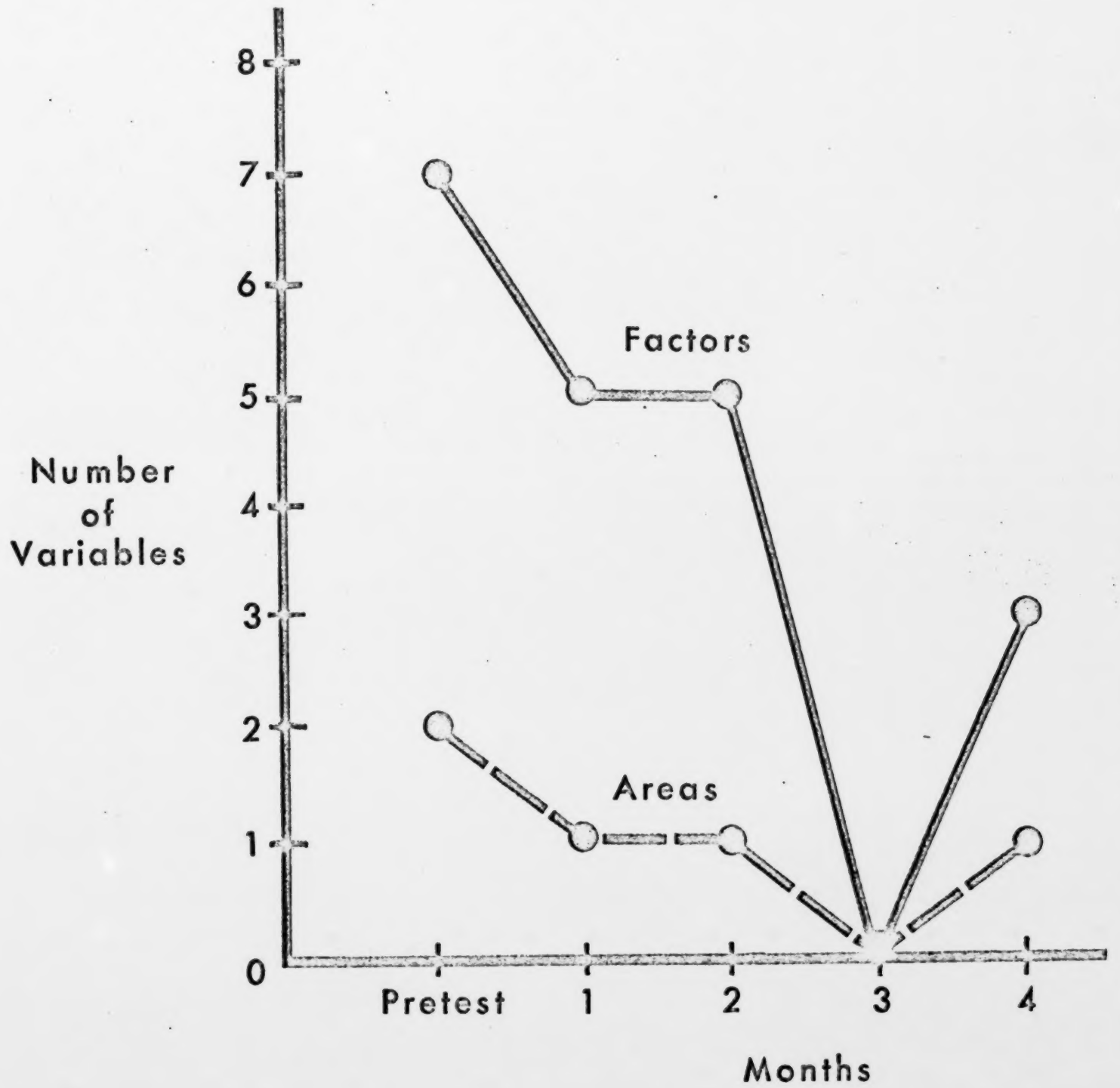

Figure 2. Factor and Area Scores of Transfer Students showing significant difference from Upperclass Students.

that all have of the future, for "hope springs eternal in the human breast" (Alexander Pope). Possibly the transfer student may view the coming semester as one of promising advantage and success. The new adventure is expected to be more rewarding and fulfilling than past experiences. Though this renewed interest in the intellectual area may not be interpreted as a resurrection of the transfer myth it would be interesting to investigate this question.

Summary

This research has endeavored to evaluate the nature and effect of expectations of the environmental press. Three primary questions have been explored and data offered for transfer students within the State University of New York.

1. Responses of anticipated environmental press, as measured by the CCI, indicated that transfer students do anticipate an environment different from that perceived by upperclass students. Statistical tests did not reveal significant differences between transfer and freshmen expectations. Therefore we have postulated the "transfer myth" to designate the unrealistic expectations of transfer students.

2. Results of the effect of the "transfer myth" on academic performance and satisfaction were somewhat unexpected and not altogether clear. Positive correlations were shown between grade point average and total disparity score for part of the sample. Small negative correlations were discovered between satisfaction and grade point average. The relation between anticipation and "transfer shock" was not revealed.

3. As hypothesized the demythologizing of the transfer myth was complete after three months of classes. Assimilation of new students into the campus culture is accomplished early in the first semester.

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